

I have been swimming on Plantation Swim Team for six years now, which means for the past six years I have heard the same exact essay come out of every graduating senior's mouth. No, it was not literally the same essay, but every single one of them had the same lesson to it, "I learned when coach says to be on time it really means five minutes early, I learned how to manage my time better balancing swimming and school, and I learned the benefits of waking up early." Now as I sit here writing a paper for the same prompt I can't help but feel that those lessons don't do my time on PST justice. By no means do I believe that they were unimportant or I didn't learn them, but I feel like I have gotten so much more than that from my six years here, and making my essay about them would be short changing myself and you all. Now then, some things I have taken to heart. Sometimes your best will NOT be good enough, and you will always have more to give.

Let me tell you a little story about the best race I have ever swam. It was the class 3A High School State Championships in 2018. It was Friday, November 9th, around 7:45 P.M., maybe 75 degrees out with no wind and not a cloud in the sky... the perfect environment for the perfect race. I was about to step onto the blocks for the state final of the 100 yard breaststroke, and I was as prepared as I could have been. I did everything in my power to be ready for that very moment,

and I knew it. It was my time to execute the perfect race. As I stepped on to the lane five block I couldn't help but smile with excitement. Then the silence... time stood still in those few seconds between the "take your mark" and the buzz... finally the buzzer went off and it was pure adrenaline. Everything went by in a flash but I knew I was executing my race to perfection. I remember pushing off the last wall and a smile creeping onto my face because I could feel the incredible race that was unfolding both in my lane and the two lanes below me as we all pushed off that final wall simultaneously. All I remember from the final lap is thinking "perfect finish, get to the wall, perfect finish, get to the wall" and I did! I just had the perfect race! I had a great start, I didn't rush my stroke, I nailed all my turns, I had strong pull outs, the perfect finish, and a big time drop! I couldn't read the board but I got out excited because I knew I couldn't have done anything better, on that day, in those 57 seconds. It wasn't until a few minutes later that I found out that I had gotten second place by 0.04 seconds. I lost. And no matter how many people congratulated me it didn't change this. As the next few days went by and I had time to watch my race and really reflect on what had happened I began to feel more helpless. I have never mentioned this to people, but my goal going into that season was to win the state title. I knew exactly who I was going up against, and I knew what I would have to do to be able to win. So, to go

through that whole season of hard work and it culminating in the best race I have ever had, but to come up .04 seconds short was incredibly hard to understand. My very best was not good enough, and that was something I had to figure out how to accept. It took me a while, struggling with motivation to train, but as the weeks went by I slowly began to accept that I wasn't good enough on that night, and truly understand that sometimes your very best won't be good enough.

Understanding that led me to a much greater realization though. I learned that although there will be times where you just aren't good enough, there is NO limit to how hard you can work. This will allow you to eventually surpass what you thought was everything you had, making your perfect race better and faster. It was about six weeks after that loss that I decided to change the way I attack practicing. I knew I had swum the perfect race, but I felt there was time left in the pool because I didn't truly give everything I had leading up to that moment. That is not to say I didn't work hard to get there, I just lacked a certain mental edge necessary to truly lay it all on the line day in and day out. At this time all I knew was that there was no way I would go out my senior year of high school with any regrets. In my mind I had to finish that final race at my state championships; eleven months from this time; and know there was nothing else I could do... no matter the outcome. After that mental shift things began to change in my mind.

Guys like David Goggins, someone who makes the impossible possible, went from being just another motivational speaker who can make you want to work hard while sitting at your desk or in your bed, to someone who stuck in my head. At all times. It helped me train my mind to be able to, and more importantly want to, work hard not just when I am comfortable, but when I am actually least comfortable. When practices got brutally hard I had to think of my goals. When I was mentally and physically exhausted I had to think of my goals. When I just plain and simply felt sluggish I had to think of my goals. Was I there to be the definition of mediocrity, or was I there to push my boundaries and get better? Because I could have chosen mediocrity in any or all of those situations and played it off as a bad day, but I was there to get better. At the end of the day I am the only person that can control what I do, and I am the only person that knows what I am capable of, so I was the only person able to change my mentality. I would be lying if I said every day was my best or fastest, but I can guarantee that I came in every day with the mindset of getting better, and I kept that through it all.

This essay may have turned into a rambling “motivationalish” speech, but I wrote from the heart. I have seen a lot of highs here, and a lot of lows. It just didn’t do my time justice to write in a cookie cutter format or hold back the

floodgates of what I have really experienced here. I have been on this team for a long time, and been swimming for even longer. The pool has always been my happy place, somewhere I can go if I am stressed, annoyed, or anxious, to feel relief and I couldn't be happier I got to spend all those moments here. If there is one thing that is for certain I will most definitely leave Plantation Swim Team with the physical and more importantly, the mental toughness to succeed in my future swimming career and beyond. Thank you PST.